

COMMUNICATING WITH A PERSON WHO HAS VERBAL APRAXIA

WHAT IS VERBAL APRAXIA?

Verbal Apraxia is a speech disorder where a person knows what they want to say but are unable to say it. This is not due to muscle weakness and is instead caused by damage to parts of the brain required for speech. Apraxia can be inconsistent and unpredictable, as sometimes the person may be able to produce 'normal' speech. This can be very frustrating. The presentation of Apraxia varies greatly, however some of the characteristics include:

- Understanding of language is often unaffected.
- Slower speech which may contain long pauses between words or syllables.
- Distorted speech. Longer words are usually more difficult to produce.
- Inconsistent errors e.g. being able to say a word in one sentence but having difficulty with the same word in the next sentence.
- "Groping" i.e. moving the speech muscles many times before initiating speech.
- Difficulties with prosody i.e. rhythm and intonation in speech.

HELPFUL STRATEGIES TO ASSIST A PERSON WITH APRAXIA TO COMMUNICATE

- **Slow down your speech.** It can be helpful to take a moment to think about what you want to say before you say it.
- As longer words can be challenging, try **breaking down long words** by saying each syllable slowly. You may find it easier to use shorter words.
- Use **non-verbal means of communication** as much as possible e.g. pointing, gestures, writing, typing on your phone.
- If you become flustered, try your best to take a breath and stay calm before starting to speak again. Sometimes **rephrasing** the sentence can work.
- **Assistive devices** like communication boards can be helpful. **Phones/tablets** may also be used as communication aids e.g. download visual aid apps or simply take photographs of frequently used items which the person can refer to if having difficulty being understood.
- Being consciously aware of breathing while speaking can help i.e. **take a deep breath** and concentrate on speaking on outward breath.



Please visit [isti.ie](https://www.isti.ie) to locate a Speech and Language Therapist near you.

You can also visit [nutricia.ie](https://www.nutricia.ie), email nutriciacare@nutricia.com or **Freephone 1800 923 404** for more information.

